

Focus On Your Health: *Senior Nutrition*

March 4, 2002

Did you know?

- Nearly 1 out of 3 senior Americans may be at high risk of malnutrition.
- Many common chronic health conditions can be effectively combated through proper nutrition.
- One year's supply of home-delivered meals costs about the same as one day in the hospital.

Background On: Senior Nutrition

Almost 10 million older Americans are at high risk of malnutrition. And among those who are homebound or recently hospitalized, almost half are at high risk. Many seniors lack the nutritional education needed to shape well-balanced meals and live healthy lifestyles.

In addition, there are millions who aren't able to prepare proper meals or don't have access to transportation to pick up groceries or supplies.

Simply by improving their diet, senior Americans can reduce the risks of heart disease, cancer, stroke, emphysema, and diabetes. Exercise also decreases the risk and prevalence of many health problems

Nutrition service programs help older participants learn to shop, plan for and prepare meals, and be mindful of any specific dietary requirements. They also connect seniors with support services including transportation, home-health aides, and home modification and food assistance programs.

The "meals on wheels" program began in Philadelphia, PA, in 1954. Since then, private and public efforts have served billions of meals to the nation's elderly and homebound all across the country.

What you can do

If you would like to join the volunteer army of over 100,000 people who help deliver, package, and serve meals to older Americans, please contact your local area agency on aging or call HHS's national Eldercare Locator at 1 (800) 677-1116.

If you or someone you care about needs assistance, please contact HHS's Eldercare Locator at 1 (800) 677-1116.

For information on senior services, contact HHS's Administration on Aging at (202) 619-7501 or www.aoa.gov.

How HHS is helping

In 1968, Congress spent \$2 million on a 3-year, 23-site demonstration project to assess the benefits of providing meals to seniors. Since then, HHS has provided 6 billion meals to senior Americans in every state in the nation.

For senior populations, HHS funds congregate and home delivered ("meals on wheels") meals. Congregate meals are served at senior centers across the country. These enable seniors to eat nutritious, culturally appropriate meals, and receive nutrition and health screening, while enjoying social interaction with their friends and neighbors.

In addition to delivering food, *meals on wheels* volunteers provide social contact and reassurance, as well as information and services to the nearly one million homebound Americans who receive their services.

This year alone, President Bush and HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson challenged HHS to provide over 300 million meals to senior Americans. Through its roughly 1,000 state, local, and tribal partners, and thousands of service providers and volunteers, HHS will spend over \$590 million to provide congregate and home delivered meals to more than 2.6 million older adults.

For 2003, President Bush has called for a \$2 million increase for home-delivered meals, while streamlining a \$150 million USDA program within HHS, to bring the HHS's total commitment to nearly \$750 million.

In case you missed it

"If this nutrition program were a restaurant, it could erect a sign out front proclaiming: Six billion served."

"And in addition to providing nutritious, healthy meals to older Americans, HHS's efforts have touched the lives of millions of senior Americans by linking them to community services that allow them to remain independent, healthy, and active."

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson 03/01/02

Future Foci

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